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ABSTRACT

The FOCUS program provided career counseling and job placement assistance to pregnant or parenting teens and young adults as well as young females who are at high risk of an early pregnancy. The goals of the program were to (1) increase economic self-sufficiency among adolescent and young adult women, thereby reducing welfare dependency and breaking the multigenerational cycle caused by teenage pregnancy; (2) facilitate their awareness and exploration of higher-paying jobs that are considered nontraditional for females; and (3) increase their ability to plan and control their lives, thereby increasing the likelihood of their productive career development in the future. Of the 109 adolescents who were identified and recruited into the program, 77 received comprehensive services (including counseling and financial support for child care and transportation) and participated in a series of workshops addressing life skills, career development, and parenting skills. The other 32 participants participated in group counseling and a workshop series focusing on life skills and parenting. Twenty-eight of the participants were placed in vocational training programs (including General Educational Development, high school, or adult basic skills programs), and 25 were placed in on-the-job training programs through various agencies. All clients received ongoing monitoring and supportive services as needed. (MN)

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INITIAL PLANS

A. ASSESSED NEEDS

1. Teen Pregnancy and the Need for Vocational Training and Placement

The problems of adolescent pregnancy and its sequalae have received considerable attention in recent years- and for good reason. 1983 data show that 11.15% of New Jersey births were to teenage mothers (ages 15 to 19). In Camden County this figure was 14.5%. In Camden City, over 29% of all births were to teens. In 1984, 71% of all births to teens were out of wedlock. In the City, the number of out of wedlock births exceeds the number of births to married women, accounting for 54% of all City births and 66% of all out of wedlock births in the County. The adverse consequences of adolescent pregnancy for teens, their children and their families are well known. Medical risks have been documented.

Socioeconomic consequences are of equal significance. Pregnancy is the largest single reason for adolescent girls to leave school. Seventy-one percent of females under 30 who receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children had their first child when they were adolescents. In 1983, $8.6 billion was spent by State and Federal governments on AFDC cash benefits, food stamps and Medicaid services for mothers and children in AFDC families established by teen mothers. It is expected that if present trends continue, two thirds of school age mothers will be 20 to 29 by 1990 will continue to receive AFDC during the coming decade (as contrasted with only 20% of the mothers aged 20 to 24). According to one study 82% of all adolescent mothers who gave birth at age 15 or younger were daughters of teenage mothers. In disadvantaged ghettos, the trends are of particular concern . Almost 50% of Black females in the United States are pregnant at age 20. Much of the "feminization" of poverty begins with adolescents having babies. The above picture is affected in large part by the fact that teenage mothers who give birth are less than one-half as likely to finish high school. They are also less likely to undertake vocational training or work in other ways which can make them goal-directed and self-sufficient, (two factors which are inversely related to fertility rates). Adolescents, who have sometimes been described as adults from the neck down and children from the neck up, are frequently overwhelmed by the reality of adolescent parenthood, and singularly unprepared to do the kind of planning and organized work needed to establish a viable lifestyle for themselves and their infants.

Contrary to the popular view, however, many adolescent parents have the capability to reverse these statistics, if they have help on a consistent, coordinated basis in doing so, and many of them desparately want to do so. At a recent meeting with teen parents, FOCUS staff heard frequently "my mother sat around watching TV and collecting welfare checks and I want something better for my kids". This was coupled with a sense of distress over the many obstacles that needed to be overcome in order to achieve economic self-sufficiency and a clearly expressed need for help in setting realistic goals and plotting feasible steps

to meet these goals. Projects are needed to assist adolescent parents in making important decisions about their educational and career futures out of reasoned thinking and knowledge. Adolescent parents who strongly desire to develop a sound life for themselves and their children often lack the awareness, information and guidance to understand how to utilize the opportunities that existing service systems offer. They also are in need of support systems which could make additional training possible (e.g. childcare and transportation together with vocational training and assistance in job placement). They can be good candidates for guidance into nontraditional jobs for women when they are motivated to change their life script. It is to meet these needs that FOCUS: A Life Skills Program for Teens, developed.

2. Adolescent Education and Employment Statistics

It is estimated that 800 youth drop out of high school annually in Camden County. Education projections show that 23% of all 9th graders in Camden County schools will fail to graduate. Although this average is below the national norm of 27.9%, it still is a disappointing statistic reflecting one in five high school youth failing to achieve at this basic educational level. In Camden City, 56% of students entering elementary school fail to graduate. This staggering statistic together with the high teenage birth rate, undoubtedly contributes to the City's known and consistently high unemployment rates. The current jobless rate in the City is about 50%, and 40% of the City's residents are receiving AFDC assistance.

The employment statistics for Camden County youth under 21, especially minorities and women, shows a 75% under-employment rate. This group of individuals who make up the future job market are experiencing little or no opportunity for employment placement thus impacting on ability to desire and obtain career goals, job mobility and further education.

3. Program Need for Vocational/Educational Career Counseling and Job Placement

In providing career counseling and job placement services to adolescent mothers and pregnant teens, the young womens' need to develop a self-identity, an awareness of competency and the experience of options, needs to be recognized.

Working with teen parents, we have learned that intense individual counseling and the networking of support services is the mainstay of any program that has as its goal, the teen's development and use of career planning, job readiness and maintenance and self-sufficiency. However, the process used to encourage, motivate and reinforce the adolescent mother and pregnant teen for her acknowledgement and use of the above mentioned skills and services, varies with each individual. For this reason, the very nature of our career counseling and job placement program must be flexible and creative.

The need to make adolescent clients aware of the opportunities available in nontraditional careers and high paying jobs, is not just some

elusive dream or overmatched challenge; it is indeed an attainable goal. Surprisingly, despite the media and presence of modern technology, our young women clients still stereotype themselves as only being able to obtain minimum wage jobs and traditional careers with deadend or limited advancement. This narrow job perspective coupled with the adolescent mother's and pregnant teen's focus on their immediate concerns of day-to-day living poses a major challenge for both the client and counselor.

It is important to realize that career counseling and job placement for teens in general has its' disadvantages and obstacles which are further compounded with the adolescent mother and pregnant teen. The problems our clients face in obtaining employment include:

- being too young
- being unskilled
- being inexperienced
- lacking job maintenance skills
- being unreliable
- being pregnant
- having no child care arrangements
- being immature
- having no high school or GED diploma
- having no future or long-term job related goals

In parallel, the availability and placement of our clients into non-traditional and/or high paying jobs have their criteria and obstacles, which include:

- education & training
- highly developed skills
- a desire for the job
- future goals
- job experience & job maintenance skills
- the difficulty of obtaining employment in some traditionally held men's jobs (e.g. trade jobs, carpentry, plumbing, etc.)
- reliable child care

These obstacles, along with our clients' need to explore and be exposed to these career opportunities, require foresight in the implementation of a counseling and job placement program for pregant and parenting young women.

4. Program Need and the Target Population

Both mounting rates of adolescent pregnancy and parenting and the dim employment outlook, particularly for under-educated adolescent females, point to the importance of employment programs developed specifically for teens. These programs must take into account special needs characteristic of this age group, and major constraints in career development, particularly for adolescent parents. In teens, job training may need to start on very basic prevocational levels, and must be coupled with ongoing support and personal attention. The FOCUS Program builds on our understanding of what works with teens to design a program for this high risk, difficult to serve population, that is most likely to have impact. The target population to be served by FOCUS is pregnant, parenting and at risk teens and young adult women, ages 16-25 residing in Camden County or being served through the Camden County Adolescent Family Life Program (CCAFL) clinical sites. The CCAFL sites alone provide a minimum and readily accessible population pool of over 800 newly pregnant teens/year, and about 250 ado-

lescent parents. Additionally, the target population can be accessed by existing CCAFL outreach activities which between 10/1/85 and 5/15/86 alone have reached over 1000 youth, as well as by utilization of existing CCAFL linkages with other youth serving programs throughout the County. The target population is primarily low income and includes minorities (mainly Blacks and Hispanics), disadvantaged persons with limited English proficiency and public assistance recipients. One hundred adolescents are targeted for involvement in the FOCUS program with at least 60 anticipated to successfully proceed into specific vocational trades. Additionally, teenagers in the 13-15 year age group in at least 5 Camden County schools, will receive information designed to encourage them to begin serious career planning. This younger group may provide our pool of trainees and workers in the years to come. It is also hoped that this outreach will work to deter early pregnancies and school drop-outs among this group.

B. Goals and Objectives

Goals: The three goals of the FOCUS Program are to:

1. Increase economic self-sufficiency among adolescent and young adult women, ages 16-25, particularly young, single parents, thereby reducing welfare dependency and breaking the cyclical generational outcome of teenage pregnancy.

2. Facilitate development of career awareness, exploration and attainment of higher paying jobs which may be nontraditional for women among the target population.

3. Increase the ability of the target population to plan and control their lives, so that their career development can be productively contained in the years to come.

Objectives

1. At least 100 young women will be identified and recruited to participate in the FOCUS program. This will require initial assessment of about 300 young women.

2. All program clients will be screened and at least 80% will receive vocational testing, including interpretation and discussion of results with the client.

3. All program participants will receive individual counseling with respect to both life skills and career/educational development.

4. Life skills training to assist at least 80% of clients in knowing how to care for themselves and their babies, thus making it possible for them to work towards career development, will be provided to program participants.

5. Career development/career exploration aimed towards development of understanding of the fundamentals of work skills (eg punctuality, responsibility, resume writing, interviewing, etc.) will be provided to 80% of program participants through the career development training program.

6. Specific job training or educational placements will be provided to 70% of program participants, with at least 25 leading to non-traditional higher paying training areas.

7. Job development/placement will be provided to at least 60% of program participants, who will be placed in specific vocational training programs, OJT's or directly in jobs.

8. Ongoing monitoring and support services and financial assistance for child care, transportation and miscellaneous stipends will be provided as needed and as funds allow to facilitate client participation.

9. Career exploration and job orientation will be provided in group sessions to at least 5 middle school age classes as preparation for future career development efforts.

10. FOCUS outcomes for 100% of programs participants will be assessed and aggregate program impact will be evaluated.

B. IMPLEMENTATION AND RESULTS

A. Activities/Tasks and Outcomes

1. 109 adolescents were identified and recruited into the FOCUS program. This was done primarily by receiving referrals through the Camden County Adolescent Family Life Program (CCAFL), which was a special prenatal care program for pregnant adolescents. Other referrals were received through schools, churches and agencies, serving the teen population of Camden County. Of the 109 participants, 77 received comprehensive services including individual counseling and financial support for childcare and transportation as needed. These 77 also participated in a series of workshops addressing life skills, career development and parenting skills. The other 32 participants were involved in a group counseling/ workshop series focusing on life skills and parenting.

2. Assessment of all 109 participants was conducted in a variety of ways. Through individual counseling and/or group experiences, a FOCUS staff member assessed each participant's motivation, vocational interests, educational status and work experience. Social service needs were also assessed and referrals to other organizations were made as needed. Screening and testing devices utilized included Harrington-O'Shay's Self-Directed Search, a standard data background information form and a social service assessment form.

3. Seventy-seven clients received comprehensive services which included individual counseling regarding life skills and career/educational development.

4. Seven extensive life skills training series were conducted along with individual counseling with participants concerning life skills. Seventy-five percent of all 109 FOCUS participants received this training.

5. Two extensive career development/career exploration workshop series were conducted along with in-depth individual counseling concerning career related areas. Sixty-nine percent of the 77 FOCUS participants received these comprehensive services.

6. The following is a list of job training or educational placements made:

High school	13
Hairdressing school	1
Basic skills program	10
On-the-job training or work experience	25
Home tutoring program	1
Nursing program	1
GED program	5
Business school	1
Computer training	1
Geriatric nurse's aid program	2

This consists of 78% of program participants. By far, the number of assisted placements into educational programs made by FOCUS staff involved placement into GED, high school programs, or basic skills programs. Many of our participants did not complete high school. Our efforts were initially aimed at guiding our participants in completing these programs. Since most of the FOCUS Program's educational efforts were aimed at placing participants in a high school program, our involvement in placing females in nontraditional training was done mostly through counseling and planting seeds of thought concerning the advantages of entering a nontraditional training and employment area.

7. Twenty-eight participants were placed in vocational training programs, including GED, high school or adult basic skills programs.

Twenty-five participants were placed in on-the-job training programs through agencies such as JTPA Summer Youth Program, NJ Youth Corps and FOCUS outreach workers. Also, several participants obtained work experience on their own in order to develop work related skills and interests and then move on to training and higher paying jobs.

8. All clients received ongoing monitoring and support services as needed.

Service provided	# receiving services
Child care	31
Transportation	37
Family involvement	29
Partner involvement	21
Social service assistance	19
Parenting education	42
Social supports	49

The importance of these support services cannot be understated. Without services such as childcare and transportation assistance, many of our participants would not be able to continue in their educational programs.

9. Eleven presentations were made concerning career exploration and job orientation to middle school age classes as a preparation for future career development efforts. This included 335 participants.

10. Follow-up of all clients was conducted in order to determine the effectiveness of this program and make recommendations for change. This was an ongoing process. Outcomes found are reflected in this report.

11. Due to the importance of a strong relationship between the Camden County Vocational-Technical School and the FOCUS Program, several FOCUS staff members met with a variety of school personnel and provided technical assistance in the areas of the prevention of student drop-out and the development of a stronger, more effective program. Also, the FOCUS Coordinator provided in-service training for teachers and staff of Camden County Vo-Tech School. The topic during the training was how to deal with pregnant and parenting teen students. For the students direct benefit, a one-time workshop concerning life skills and parenting issues was conducted for approximately 20 students.

B. Timelines

All activities were ongoing and individually determined according to each participant's needs. Generally, a client receiving comprehensive services would be initially assessed by a FOCUS staff member, attend a 20 hour life skills workshop series, a 20 hour career development workshop series, receive individual counseling which included parenting education and ongoing support and then be placed in some type of educational program.

Workshops conducted for middle school classes and for those adolescents not receiving comprehensive services were scheduled at times available to FOCUS staff and school personnel.

C. Staffing

1. Career Specialist - provided career development workshops series and individual counseling sessions.

2. Family Counselor - recruited participants for FOCUS activities, conducted a social service assessment, provided life skills training, and arranged childcare and transportation for participants.

3. Social Worker - provided services similar to those described under Family Counselor.

These staff members worked closely with other FOCUS staff who were receiving funds through other sources.

D. Strategies employed to eliminate sex bias and sex role stereotyping.

As previously mentioned, participants through individual and group counseling experiences were exposed to the idea and advantages of entering nontraditional employment and training. The FOCUS staff realized the importance of this issue and made a strong effort to plant seeds of thought in participants' minds concerning this topic.

E. Data utilization for program planning and decision-making

As the FOCUS program developed and participants were receiving services, it was found that due to the multiplicity and complexity of client needs, longer, indepth individual counseling was needed in order to have real impact upon participants lives than originally anticipated. The issues which were frequently dealt with included practical ones such as lack of transportation and childcare, as well as more complex issues such as major family conflicts, serious housing problems, substance abuse, etc. and/or personal/emotional problems which made it difficult for participants to build trusting relationships with staff and other participants.

Another issue which strongly effected program planning and decision making was recruitment. This process was not an easy process. Of all referrals made to the FOCUS program, it was found that approximately one in five teens actually participated in a FOCUS activity.

F. Conclusions and recommendations

We believe this program's success is based upon the concept that all aspects of each participant's life must be addressed in order to be effectively counseled and placed in an appropriate training/educational program. The life skills and parenting workshop series and individual counseling assisted our participants in choosing and following particular career paths.

The life skills/parenting and career development curriculum created by FOCUS staff to be utilized in a workshop series format is available to staff members of other programs.